

# EMWA Freelance Business Survey 2007

by Alistair Reeves and Sam Hamilton

The previous and first EMWA Freelance Business Survey was conducted in 2003 on a paper questionnaire distributed at the Lisbon Freelance Forum and was subsequently sent out by post and e-mail. It was an ambitious questionnaire (first attempts at anything often are!), as any reader who has consulted the results of the survey on the website will have seen. With much badgering and follow-up, we finally received 63 completed questionnaires.

For the 2007 survey, we moved into the 21st Century with a much simplified, web-based questionnaire on [www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com), following Kelly Goodwin's example with the EMWA survey for salaried medical writers. Our survey was open from 4 March–13 July 2007, by which time, with advertising in *TWS*, on the website, and at the Vienna 2007 conference, 101 respondents had completed at least one question—a much better result than 2003. Most respondents completed most of the questions, but two respondents answered only one question each.

This report on the 2007 survey includes some comparisons with the results of the 2003 survey. A document on the website contains all results for both years where possible; it was not always appropriate because the content of some of the questions differed. Also, the 2003 questionnaire was addressed to individual freelancers and small businesses with up to 7 employees (the latter accounted for 27% of the sample), whilst the 2007 survey was addressed *only* to individual freelancers, whether registered as a limited company (or national equivalent) or not. The 2007 survey is now closed.

## Number of responses and countries

By 13 July 2007, 101 responses had been received: 47 (47%) from the United Kingdom, 20 (20%) from Germany, 6 (6%) from Switzerland, 4 (4%) from France, 3 (3%) from Spain, 2 each (2%) from India and The Netherlands, and 1 each from Austria, Belgium, Canada, China, Denmark, Eire, Italy, Portugal, Taiwan, Sweden, and the United States of America (6 respondents skipped the question).

## EMWA membership and website

85/99 (86%) respondents were EMWA members, and 48/99 (49%) had their own website.

## Type of freelancer and hours worked

57/96 (59%) of respondents were full-time freelancers, 32/96 (33%) part-time freelancers, and 7/96 (7%) were in full-time employment and doing freelance work. No definition of 'full-time' or 'part-time' was given; the respondents decided whether they were full-time or part-time.

52/95 (55%) respondents work 31 – >50 hours per week, presumably mostly full-timers, and 43/95 (45%) work 1–30 hours per week, presumably mostly part-timers (Table 1).

Table 1: Number of hours worked per week (N=95)

Hours per week	Number of responses (%)
1-10	10 (11)
11-20	7 (7)
21-30	26 (27)
31-40	31 (33)
41-50	16 (17)
>50	5 (5)

## Sources of work

Respondents were asked to indicate their sources of work (totalling 100%) from the categories given in Table 2, which shows the mean percentage of work obtained from each source.

Table 2: Sources of freelance work (N=87)

Source	Mean % of work
Longstanding customers	49
Referrals from colleagues	22
CROs/agencies	21
Referrals from customers	10
EMWA freelance directory	10
Own advertising	8
Other freelance directories	1
'Looking for a medical writer'	1
Other	1

CRO=contract research organisation

This pattern was similar to that of the 2003 survey. It is worth noting, however, that the mean percentage of work from the EMWA freelance directory increased from 5% in 2003 to 10% in 2007.

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*Types of activity*

Respondents were asked to indicate their types of activity (totalling 100%) from the categories given in Table 3, which shows the mean percentages of each type of activity.

Table 3: Types of freelance activity (N=84)

Type of activity	Mean % of work
Writing	67
Editing	18
Translation	11
Consultancy work	6
Training events	6
Quality control	6
Proofreading	3
E-publishing	1
Other	3

Again the pattern was similar to the 2003 survey, with writing as the major activity, followed by editing and translation. The mean percentage of work time spent writing increased from 57% in 2003 to 67% in 2007, and the mean time spent translating from 5 to 11%.

*Types of documentation*

Respondents were asked to indicate the type of documentation they generally work on (totalling 100%) from the categories given in Table 4, which shows the mean percentages of each type of document worked on.

Table 4: Types of freelance activity (N=83)

Type of documents	Mean % of work
Documents used for drug approval	41
Scientific papers	35
Marketing materials	12
Training, presentation and educational materials	6
Investigator brochures	5
Product information, websites	4
Text books, SOPs	3
Consultancy documentation	1
User manuals for devices	0
Other	6

SOP=standard operating procedure

As in 2003, the mean percentage of time spent on documents used for drug approval and journal articles for the medical and scientific press were greatest. The mean percentage of time spent on journal articles increased from 24% in 2003 to 35% in 2007. The absence of small businesses from the 2007 sample may be partly responsible for this (this is based solely on the anecdotal observation [conversations at EMWA meetings] that freelancers often seem to be approached by individuals to write or edit journal articles as they are expected to be cheaper, and it is often not worth small [and indeed larger] businesses taking on this type of job.).

*Hourly charges for medical writing and related activities*

All charges were to be given in euros as *average* hourly rates for the activity in question. Charges entered in other currencies were converted to euros at the 13 July 2007 rate. An hourly rate of € 750 for all activities from one respondent was assumed to be € 75. Several respondents entered ranges: the midpoint was taken as the average value.

The average hourly rates (mean ± standard deviation; median [range]) for the different activities are given in Table 5, rounded to full figures.

Table 5: Average hourly rates

Activity <sup>a</sup>	Hourly rate (€)				
	2007			2003 <sup>b</sup>	
	N	mean ± SD	median (range)	N	median (range)
Consultancy	26	105 ± 50	91 (29–250)	26	105 (20–>160)
Medical writing	76	76 ± 23	75 (29–140)	55	80 (20–160)
Editing	52	71 ± 26	75 (29–140)	48	70 (20–150)
Quality control	26	73 ± 31	65 (30–150)	21	75 (20–>160)
Proofreading	34	69 ± 29	62 (25–140)	24	55 (20–150)

SD=standard deviation

a 3 respondents answered for E-publishing with hourly rates of € 65 (2) and 200 (1).

b Mean ± SD was not calculated for 2003.

Average hourly rates have not changed between 2003 and 2007. The absence of a difference between the medians and ranges for writing and editing may be because editing was defined as 'editing texts that need considerable rewriting'. The lower medians for consultancy and writing may have been influenced by the absence of small businesses from the sample. Except for consultancy, there were no responses higher than € 150 per hour for any activity, and some of us will be surprised that some colleagues can evidently earn as much as this per hour *on average*. Some writers, however, are still obviously charging *very low average* rates (10/76 responses for writing and 13/52 for editing were between € 29 and 49 per hour). Perhaps this survey will encourage them that they can reasonably charge more.

19 respondents entered charges for training (Table 6, rounded to full figures).

Table 6: Charges for training

Activity <sup>a</sup>	Hourly rate (€)				
	2007			2003 <sup>b</sup>	
	N	mean ± SD	median (range)	N	median (range)
Whole day	19	815 ± 406	1000 (400–2300)	16	955 (850–>1150)
Half day	15	510 ± 238	475 (200–1000)	14	517 (475–775)
Hourly	7	107 ± 62	100 (46–200)	8	Not calculated (40–190)
Preparation	8	84 ± 34	84 (48–150)	3	Not calculated

SD=standard deviation

a 2007 charges of € 75 for a half day and €150 for a whole day entered by one respondent were not included as these were assumed to be an error, because the same respondent gave an hourly rate for training of € 100.

b Mean ± SD was not calculated for 2003.

No substantial shifts in charges for half-day or whole-day training events were seen between 2003 and 2007.

Because we asked for average charges, we also asked respondents to tell us if they had different charges for different client groups (Table 7).

Table 7: Charges for different client groups

Client group <sup>a</sup>	No clients	N	Lower	Same	Higher
Pharmaceutical companies	11% (8)	64	2%	64%	34%
Agencies	26% (19)	55	7%	89%	4%
CROs	38% (28)	45	2%	92%	6%
Private persons	61% (44)	44	54%	46%	0%
Colleagues	43% (31)	41	49%	51%	0%
Higher education establishments	59% (45)	31	48%	52%	0%
Physicians (hospital or practice)	60% (42)	28	39%	61%	0%
Government organizations	66% (46)	24	17%	83%	0%

CRO=contract research organisation

<sup>a</sup> Each row should be read as follows: Pharmaceutical companies – 72 respondents answered the question: 8+64 = 72; 8/72 (11%) do not work for pharmaceutical companies; of the 64 who work for pharmaceutical companies, 2% charge lower than their average hourly rate, 64% charge their average hourly rate, and 34% charge higher than their average hourly rate.

## Freelance

The noun 'freelance' was first coined by Sir Walter Scott in the 19th century and referred to a medieval mercenary soldier. Now the expression means a self-employed person offering their services where needed, not under contract to any single employer (source <http://www.all-words.com> where its translation into various languages can also be found).

## Articles about medical writing in *Science Magazine*

Anyone thinking of a career in medical writing might be interested in a series of articles in *Sciencecareers* of *Science Magazine*. These can be found on the website

[http://sciencecareers.sciencemag.org/career\\_development/previous\\_issues/articles/](http://sciencecareers.sciencemag.org/career_development/previous_issues/articles/)

by adding the following after the last slash

[2007\\_06\\_22/caredit\\_a0700088/\(parent\)/104](http://sciencecareers.sciencemag.org/career_development/previous_issues/articles/2007_06_22/caredit_a0700088/(parent)/104)

[0980/careers\\_in\\_medical\\_writing\\_opening\\_doors\\_feature\\_index/\(parent\)/104](http://sciencecareers.sciencemag.org/career_development/previous_issues/articles/0980/careers_in_medical_writing_opening_doors_feature_index/(parent)/104)

[3570/starting\\_a\\_career\\_in\\_science\\_writing/\(parent\)/104](http://sciencecareers.sciencemag.org/career_development/previous_issues/articles/3570/starting_a_career_in_science_writing/(parent)/104)

Although these articles relate to the US much of what they say is relevant to European medical writers too.

Thanks to **Raquel Billions**

([medical.writing@billiones.biz](mailto:medical.writing@billiones.biz)) for these sites.

## EMWA Freelance Business Survey 2007

The results were similar to those in 2003: about a third of those who work for pharmaceutical companies charge them more than their average rate, and about 40–50% of those who work for private people, colleagues, higher education establishments and physicians charge them lower rates than average. Most respondents who work for agencies, CROs and government organisations (about 80–90%) charge their average rates.

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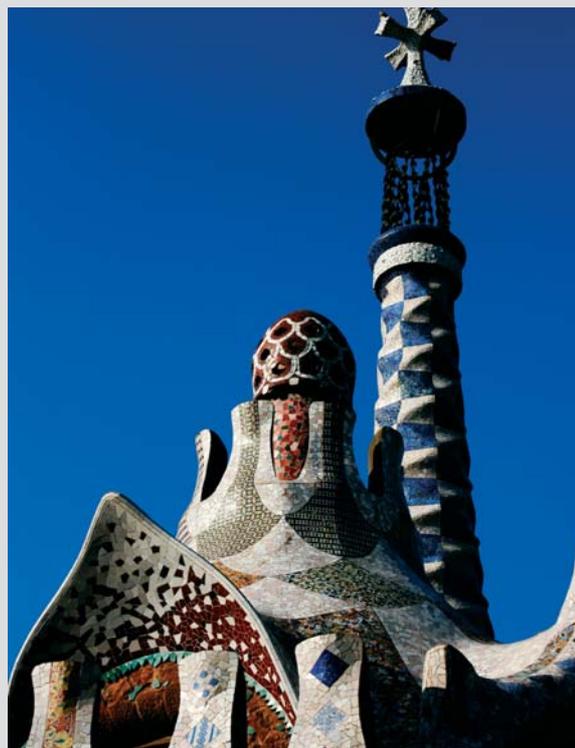
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## EMWA's 17<sup>th</sup> Annual Spring Conference 2008

An important date to note for 2008's diary is the EMWA Annual Spring Conference, which will be held from 29th April to 3rd May 2008 in Barcelona, Spain, at the Hotel Rey Juan Carlos 1 (<http://www.hrjuancarlos.com/en/index.html>).

A full announcement will be made in the December 2007 issue of *TWS*.